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## When Water Makes Civilization: The Role of Rivers in Bangka Island in the XVIII-XIX Century

**ABSTRACT:** This study aims to find the contribution of rivers in the formation of human civilization. This study examines the role of rivers in Bangka Island around the XVIII-XIX century. The method used to analyze the data found is social history, especially regarding the social changes that were influenced by the activities of the migrants on this island. The results of this study indicate that the river in Bangka Island is the main route used as a medium for the movement of people and goods, which are transported by ship. The existence of the island of Bangka, which is close to the open sea, allows the arrival of the pirates who control this island. They were expelled by Panglima Sarah, a commander from Johor, Malay Peninsula and Hulubalang Harimau Garang from Minangkabau, West Sumatera. These two figures were subsequently involved in the development of the Islamic community in Bangka Island. Rivers in Bangka Island create also an aquatic life that drives various social changes. The encounters of local residents with migrants form an understanding of how a culture of hospitality should be formed and strengthened. The presence of Chinese elements in Bangka Island culture, for example, is evidence of the local community's acceptance of immigrant culture.

**KEY WORDS:** River; History; Migrants; Collaboration.

### INTRODUCTION

A river is a geographical basin that is drained by water. Usually, rivers flow from high places to low places. Mountain areas have always been the place where water comes from. Next, the water flows through a small path until it is connected to a large path. It is on this side of the great waterway that human life takes place. They build civilizations on the banks of rivers,

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and this is important, considering that every creature cannot live without water. So, this makes sense, if every human civilization started from the edge of a waterway, as found on the Nile in Ancient Egypt) or on the Euphrates and Tigris in Mesopotamia (Faccenna *et al.*, 2019; Perdibon, 2021).

In other cases, seeing the role of rivers in an island is another unique thing. Usually, the life of the island people is identical to water, then they are again surrounded by waterways in the form of rivers. It is undeniable, before the era of land vehicles came to power, waterways became the main choice for people who wanted to come and leave the island, including on Bangka Island, an island in Indonesia. Here, the river becomes a source of activity for the people who live in it. To support this position, river docks were also built to make it easier to load goods into ships (Susi, Adi & Sari, 2018).

River historiography in Indonesia is included in the minimally written theme. Perhaps, researchers do not feel it is important, considering that this theme is usually juxtaposed with economic history, which also attaches importance to the function of river routes. This article wants to explore the contribution of a complex river, namely by photographing the activities of the people that pass through it. Here, the river is not only a kind of locus, but also a text that builds the complete historiography of Indonesian society itself.

The rivers that are the object of research are Baturusa, Layang, and Mendu. These three rivers represent the activities of the Bangka Island community that are related to almost all aspects of human life, such as politics, trade, religion, and so on.

We are aware to write some findings about the history of rivers in Bangka Island. Writing sources are often derived from local historians' stories, books written by them, Dutch records, and other relevant books. To be honest, the weakness of local history study lies in the scarcity of sources. To find them, it takes quite a long time and the provision of adequate research. This becomes a common problem that is still found today by professional historians, who are exploring local historical themes.

The writers divide the discussion of the history of the Bangka Rivers in two phases of development: the period of kingdom of the Archipelago (*Nusantara*) featuring the face of evolution (developed changes that are slowly but surely); and the period of colonialism, both British and Dutch, which put forward the involution face of the rivers. The writers believe that in the colonial period, especially the Dutch, a massive decline of the role of the rivers in the life of the people of Bangka Island happened.

## METHODS

This study uses a social history approach in describing human activities related to rivers. The river has become a melting pot for various human interests, ranging from politics, economics, and issues of religious conversion. In Bangka Island, Indonesia, the models for these three aspects can be found. The design of the explanation will refer to the chronological aspects, which is adjusted to the scene that happened first, then move on to the next scene (Stearns, 2019).

The results of this study were obtained after going through historical research methods. There are four steps of this research. First, the search for writing sources, namely looking for a number of books, journals, and oral information from relevant and competent sources with the theme of this study. Second, after the source is selected, criticism will be made on it, namely by checking the authenticity of the source. Third, after obtaining some information, the collection of pieces is analyzed and linked chronologically, according to the social history frame found in human life on the banks of the river. Fourth, writing history, in this point is to write this article (Madjid & Wahyudhi, 2014).

The story of the river as the driving force of history is still just an insertion in the study of national history. In fact, as inhabitants living in the areas of islands, such as Indonesia, discussing rivers, bays, capes, coasts, lakes, and other large watery niches is a necessity. In the wheel of history, humans cannot be separated from the geographic aspects that surround them. Instead, it is this geographic condition that sometimes affects the developmental and civilized vision of a group of people.

The Bangka River, must be acknowledged, is still included in the subject of local history. Local history discusses about past events that are local, confined to the administrative range, geographical range, and specific ethnicity. Events in the local history have not been found in the national history forums. In fact, if it is thought more deeply, the society certainly need the intake of the historical description as a reference in reading the movement of the times and respond to rapid global changes. Of course, from history there will always be something to obtain, at least as a matter of reflection and inspiration.

In recent years, the study of local history is on the rise, along with the development of the times. At least it is a subjective judgment of the writer. Around the last six years, the writers have involved a lot in the study of local history, like in Rokan Hilir (Riau), Kerinci (Jambi), Bangka (Bangka Belitung Islands), Kupang (East Nusa Tenggara), and Tana Toraja (South Sulawesi). When the writers came to these regions, the interest of the regional government, chairman of the traditional council (*dewan*

*adat*), religious leaders and society in general were very enthusiastic and accepted the proposal of the writers to nationalize the study of local history. Some ways to do this were by conducting researches and organizing seminars. In fact, what made the writers amazed and proud was that there was a tribal leader of Toraja (in *Tana Toraja* it is called *Puang*), who funded researches about Toraja using private funds.

Of course, the assumption that the policy makers “open their eye” to look at the historical study of the area is something that is questionable. Opinions emerging from the society related to local historical discovery always exist, but only some of them are constrained by funding access and the lack of ideas from which to begin to track files as a source of history. The general pattern is to have an audience together with related government, but the results vary, in which some are taken seriously, but some others are only kept in a drawer or are ignored subtly.

The unique profession associated with the study of local history is the local historian. On several occasions, the writers feel helped a lot by the presence of the local historian. Actually, the title of “local historian” is not suitable for them, given what they are doing is the same as that of the professional historian who has been engaged a lot in researches that are rich of themes or those who majored in history at the level of study at universities (Bachelor, Master to Doctoral programs). The advantages of local historians exist at a depth of knowledge about historical themes in their environment. Living and growing in a certain environment and sharp instinct to deal with the history of the region where he lives, are two advantages that they have. Indeed, when dealing with them, professional historians look like “newcomers” who do not know anything about local history theme.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Since the pre-kingdom of the *Nusantara's* Archipelago, the life of the people of Bangka Island has never been free from water. It is reported in a local source, there is one story of the beginning of human presence in Bangka Island associated with the presence of a large boat cruise from Johor, Malay Peninsula, led by Captain Ragam. Along the way, the ship was attacked until its captain was lost. This big boat was gradually becoming the island, its poles became the mountains, the splinters of wood from the hull became the island of Belitung, most of the other wood became Batu Balai (a village near Muntok), kitchen tools were transformed into settlements becoming Sembuang Dapur (village in Toboali). The living inhabitants became the first residents of Bangka Island (De Clerq, 1895).

Bangka is an island that is acknowledged for its rich mines, especially

tin. The discovery of tin there has changed the living standard of Bangka Island people, who originally lived farming in a sandy-soil field into tin miners (Anonymous, 1865). Sandy soil lying in Bangka Island is a major obstacle of why agriculture in Bangka Island is not as advanced as one in other regions. Pepper plantations recently bred, were previously unpopular to be planted by the people. Tin has become the answer to the economic scarcity that hits Bangka Island people from decade to decade. They feel that this is like a gift on less fertile soil that does not much change the economy of local residents.

Nonetheless, Bangka Island is in fact known by “its history of tin”. Whereas, this is one of the labels that adverse Bangka Island discourse as a text of history that always opens. Tin, as if, surrounds, or covers other historical discourse. Therefore, discussing the existence of rivers in Bangka Island as a historical study is one way to get out of the cover of the label “Bangka and its tin” (Erman, n.y.).

Recorded in the *Enciclopaedie van Nederlandsch Indie*, it is mentioned that in the entry of “Banka”, the area relies on many streams as the route of transportation. Bangka Island is known to have many rivers, but many marshy areas are found at the edges. The rivers on the island have more strong rapids. On the other hand, the island is also filled with the contour of the valleys and ravines (cf Van der Lith *et al.*, 1896; Wertheim, 1956; Somers-Heidhues, 1992).

Jering river is one of the major rivers in Bangka Island. The headwaters are in the hills of Maras and the stream passed through several areas including Kota Waringin (Kotawaringin), Mundo (Mendu), Soengei Selan (Sungaiselan), by using a small boat that can be continued up to Poepoet (Puput), about 30 km ahead. The stream of Jering river has other lanes slightly upward. This stream is heading the estuary passing Bangkakota, but the river is only be traversed by one *koyan* of boat, and only can take the distance of about 30 km ahead. The stream of the river also flows through several areas, such as Kabal, Balar, Bangka Ujung, Olim, Njerie (Nyere), and Gosong. The other streams of Jering river have reached Kapo (Kapo) and Goemba (Gumba). There the contours of the land are marshy and close to the beach.

The river that flows in Ketiak and Kobak (Koba) is included in the stream of West Nibung and East Nibung. The stream of Koerouw river (Kuraw), Lempojang river (Lempuyang), Batoe Rossa river (Baturusa) – one of the other big rivers, all have estuaries in Mapur hill. The stream of Baturusa river on the left passed Segentin and Merawang, while on the right irrigated Pangkalpinang, Sungailiat, Diniang, and Mapur. The other, Layang river whose estuary is located in Klabat bay, is a river whose lines

of communication (*communicatieweg*), heading North, passing Panji, Blinyu, and Kadjoet (Kajut), while its western side passed Antan. In Jebus bay, a river spanned passing through Kampa and Bedong. Many rivers in Bangka Island are used as a means of transporting the tin ([Van der Lith et al., 1896](#)).

In a statement, it is explained that generally the river in Bangka Island around the 19<sup>th</sup> century had rather steep contour on the left and right land side, forming a small hill. In some rivers are quite swift streams. The ships transporting tin are still going back and forth as previous times. Small rivers can still be traced using a small ship, for example from Sungaiselan to Puput, which is about 30 km.

Some of the rivers that flow into the west, that is to the Bangka strait, among others are Jering river, the biggest river that originates from the mount Maras, Kotawaringin, Jeruk, Mundo, Sungaiselan, Bangkakotta (Bangkakota). Then, the inland Bangka whose upstream can be passed through among others are Kabal, Balar, Bangka Ujung, Olim, Nyeri, and Gossong. There are some of these names similar to the names of the other rivers in Bangka Island, but it can be also possible that the same names of the stream of the rivers are only the stream of the creeks.

Furthermore, the river that has estuary on the east coast of the island of Bangka is Kapo river, Gumba, Katiak, Koba, Nibung, Kurauw, Lempuyang, and Baturusa. Baturusa is another Bangka Island biggest river. There are some rivers connected one to another, like Segentin Merawang river with streams passing through the right side of Pangkalpinang. There is also a stream of the creek of Segentin connected to Sungailiat, Diniang, and Mapur.

The river whose estuary in Klabat bay is Layang river. This river is one of the biggest river in Bangka Island and has become an important waterway from North to Panji (Blinyu) and Kajut. On the west coast there is a river estuary that is in Antan, which also has become one of the ship traffic lane. Jebus bay is the estuary of three rivers, namely the river of Kampa, Bedong and Jebus ([Winkler-Prins et al., 1912](#)).

The Sriwijaya period is a golden age for Sumatra's history, not least for its buffer areas, such as Bangka Island. The present-day of Village Kampapur, whose location faces directly into Bangka Strait, becomes a silent witness to the relationship of Bangka people with the entity of more heterogeneous society. In the area to the west and north of this village lies a coastal swamp of 100 hectares and off its shores there are three clusters of islands, namely Medang Island, Hantu Island, and Kecil Island. In the north, it flows Mendu river about 26,500 m in length, and is the longest river in Bangka Island after Layang river (approximately 32,500 m) and

Baturusa river (approximately 31,250 m).

Mendu river flows from northeast towards the west and ends in Bangka strait. This river has some creeks namely Kupang river or Air Pancur, Air Gintong, Air Kampung, and Air Rembiak. To note, *aik* or *air* in Bangka language means small river. Allegedly, through this Mendu river, Bangka people made contact with *Kedatuan* Sriwijaya, adjacent areas, even with others Southeast Asian mainland. This statement is quite pithy, supported by the results of research in 2007, conducted by a joint team of *Balai Arkeologi Palembang* (Palembang Archaeological Hall), *Balai Pelestarian Peninggalan Purbakala Jambi* (Archaeological Heritage Conservation Hall of Jambi), and *Dinas Seni dan Budaya Kabupaten Bangka* (Art and Culture Agency of Bangka Regency) that found pieces of the remains of a boat made of ironwood (*eusideroxylon zwageri*) derived from the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD (*Anno Domini*), in two different locations around Kupang (Elvian, 2011).

Indirectly, the river brings social change to the people of Bangka Island. This can be seen, for example, in the case of changing professions from being a pepper farmer to being a tin miner. In this life cycle, the river becomes a route for sending various commodities from local docks to larger ports, such as those available in Palembang's territory, namely Teluk Cengal port. The international port city of Muntok, too, cannot live without supplies from the interior of Bangka, which are imported by rivers (Rangkuti, 2017).

Akhmad Elvian (2012a), citing J.C. Van Leur (1983), mentioned that in the Sriwijaya era there were some export commodities, such as: eaglewood, camphor, sandalwood, ivory, tin, ebony (black wood), sappan wood, spices, and incense. In addition, news from Arab states that Sriwijaya's exported goods were cloves, nutmeg, cardamom, areca nut, eaglewood, sappan wood, spices, turtles, gold, silver, and pepper. Commodities such as turtles, eaglewood, incense, spices (pepper), areca nut, and tin were goods easily found in Bangka Island at that time (Van Leur, 1983; Elvian, 2012a).

J.C. Van Leur (1983) assumed that the Hindu colony was not created simply, but only semi-permanent, outside the center of government. They used the power of local rulers who had become Hindus. They would become the representatives of the central government. Trade in the Hindu period often became a bridge of the spread of new human models, such as culture, religion, and human migration (Van Leur, 1983). The situation as such was at least seen from the existence of Bangka Island, whose position became a satellite area of the larger central civilization, such as Sriwijaya in South Sumatera and Majapahit in East Java.

In one of the colonial records, it is mentioned about the existence of the Javanese people entering the rivers of Bangka Island. They established the great buildings on the riverbank of Kotawaringin, Mundo (Mendu), Selan, and Bangkakota (Horsfield, 1848). Their presence there was not to fully control, but rather appointed someone to be the leader of the people of Bangka Island. Perhaps what did by the Javanese people happened when Bangka Island was under the authority of Majapahit in 13<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> century AD. It is said that the King of Majapahit sent Prince Tumenggung Dinata to govern in Bangka Island, by establishing several *Kepatihan*. In the Mendu area, the *Patih* (Prime Minister on the ancient archipelago) was named Patih Tali; and in the area of Jeruk, the *Patih* was named Panjang Jiwa (Elvian, 2012b).

Majapahit period is the era of the emergence of some of the old villages (kampong) in Bangka Island, one of which is the Village Jeruk. The comers possibly came down the Jeruk river and arrived in one of the areas later restorated, which was later called Jeruk. The beginning of human settlements in Jeruk arose as a result of the development of a base (*pangkal*) there. The base in Jeruk has already been visited by humans, even though tin has not been found in Jeruk. Subsequent human arrivals are driven more by the factors of search for forest commodities. Now, Village Jeruk does not exist. The village was lost around the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Jeruk area is now included in the area of Village Labu and sub-district Puding Besar. Even in Kotawaringin, there is also the base that had already been crowded before a tin mine was found there.

Bangka coast of the western part was the longstanding route of international trade. Almost certainly, when traders from Sumatra, Malay Peninsula, or other lands above the wind wanted to trade to the Eastern part of the Archipelago, they would pass through the west coast of Bangka. Some important points used as a place to anchor the ships were in Kota Kapur, Bangkakota, Kotawaringin, and Muntok. The crowds of sailors, explorers, and merchants passing along the west coast allowed experiments to enter the rivers of Bangka. From there, several newcomers started hanging out with the local inhabitants, even the result of their synergy resulted in several early villages in Bangka Island, such as Kampung Punggur, Maras, Jeruk, and Panji (Usman *et al. eds.*, 2015).

When the early village was increasingly growing, there were trials to explore the lanes of the rivers and creeks until upstream emerged. Several rivers in Bangka Island were linked to the presence of smaller creeks. Layang river, for example, at first the residents knew that this separated river has a separate stream, but once held exploratory search, it is found that there are lanes that connect the river to Jeruk river, precisely near

Panji Village or *Kampung Panji* (Usman *et al. eds.*, 2015).

When Malacca became a commercial center of Southeast Asian trade in 15<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> century, Bangka Island had a position as a regional supplier of needs in a larger *bandar* (port city). M.A.P. Meilink-Roelofs (2016) mentioned that Bangka became one of the potential islands in the waters around Palembang. Its inhabitants were sailors and the number of people there had declined, due to the battle between Depati Unus against the Portuguese at that time. Almost the same as the inland of Sumatra, Bangka Island produced food products, forest products, cotton and iron, while tin had not been mentioned at that time (Meilink-Roelofs, 2016).

When Bangka Island was under the authority of Palembang Sultanate, in 1127 AH (*Anno Hijriyah*) or 1711 AD (*Anno Domini*), Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin with his wife and his retainers sailed to Siantan Island. On his way he made a stopover in Bangkakota after previously going down the river to get to his destination. Three companions of Sultan Mahmud Badaruddin named Wan Akub, Wan Sirin, and Wan Sabar fell into the river and floated up to the stream of Ulim river. In one of the bank of Ulim river, they witnessed many gibbons. They went on the bank of the river and checked around gathering places of gibbons, and accidentally discovered the tin sand there. They already knew tin since being in the land of Johor in Malay Peninsula. There they saw the Malays and the Chinese searching for tin. Later, many people dug the cliff around the river and found even more tin in it (Weiringa, 1990).

Bangka coastal area became one of the suppliers of trading needs of Bandar Palembang. M.A.P. Meilink-Roelofs (2016) stated that Palembang was one of the suppliers of the needs in international *bandar* of Malacca in around the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Ten to twelve junks sailed to Malacca each year to transport rice, garlic, onions, meat, wine, forest products such as rattan, honey, *paraffin*, and benzoin. Slaves from Palembang were also marketed in Malacca. From Malacca, Palembang got fabrics from Gujarat and Keling (Meilink-Roelofs, 2016). Probably these fabrics also reached Bangka.

Sailing ship became a means of transportation many used around the 15<sup>th</sup> century, even since the previous period. In the commercial map of the Archipelago, although the role of Bangka Island is not much highlighted, that does not mean the position is underestimated. Bangka Island has been known by foreign merchants for its excellent pepper quality. Bangka coast has met the requirements as a suitable port to lean on merchant ships. In the port, it is possible to do unloading of goods, to fill supplies of food and clean water and to wait for the wind flow of sailing season back. Security at the port is also guaranteed, given its position that is not far from the center of Palembang government. Even the Arab merchants who

stopped by possibly participated in spreading Islam there ([Gadjahnata et al. eds., 1986](#)).

Long time ago, the Bangka River become a friendly route for sailors or people whose professions were adjacent to the river and coast. They used sailing ships along major rivers, or small boats paddled to go along the edge or cross small rivers. Bangka people have already taken benefit greatly from the natural treasury of the river. Fishing, putting fish trap (*bubu*) and catching seems have long been done by them to obtain fish, crab or seashell processed into a daily snack. There are several local terms about the tool or activities to catch fish, such as *jaring* (nets), *bubu* (fish traps), *tekulak*, *serumbang*, *ngeroh aik*, *serampang*, *tanggole*, and *tuba*.

The next possibility is, that the Chinese-model junks had also been navigating the edge of Bangka Island, particularly the lanes connected to the Strait of Malacca. Around the 15<sup>th</sup> century, when the second friendship visit of Cheng Ho, reportedly one of Chinese junks of Cheng Ho's troop was anchored around Toboali. Some of the crew there were off and explore around Toboali. There, Cheng Ho visited Bukit Durian (Durian Hill). The location was about 2 km from the shore of Tanjung Ketapang (Cape Katapang). According to local belief, Cheng Ho had established a shrine (*klenteng*), which today is called *Klenteng Sam Po Kong*. If referring to the naming, *Sam Po Kong* is another name of Cheng Ho ([Huanzhi, 2015](#)). The fragments of this information show that Bangka Island has become an important destination of international ships that anchored to farther places to the waters of the inland of the Archipelago.

Junk became the model of many ships operating around the Java Sea to the South China Sea, even up to Benggala bay in India around the 15<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> century. Junk was used as a means of transporting commodities from and to the waters of the Archipelago. The steering system of junk was a genuine assembly of the Indonesian people. When the Portuguese set foot in the waters of the strait of Malacca, reportedly they were so fascinated with junks, because the size was much larger than *galleon* ships or *galleys* they used. Unfortunately, in the subsequent period, especially since the entry of Dutch colonials, the role of the junks was replaced by smaller sailing ships and European-made ships. Possibly, the craftsmen of junks already switched to work on orders of other smaller ships or served the demand of merchants. There were also those who worked for European shipyards in the Archipelago ([Horridge, 2015](#)).

Fisheries in the strait that separates Bangka Island and Palembang are included in the category of good and high quality. For residents of the coast, fish becomes the main food. The species of fish inhabiting these waters is *tapa*, *lemak*, *lais*, *tebangalan*, *patin*, *bandung*, *klyuyu*, *pareh*, *dalum*,

*blidah, sagaret, arok, toman, tongkol, delak, bluju, catfish, juara, blutulang, tebangkang*, etc. Meanwhile, the fish that becomes the main prey is *lemak, lais, patin, jangutan, delek, and kali* (Farida, 2009).

In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the center of Palembang Sultanate placed a strategic position that was reached by ships from the sea and from inland river. Human traffic using water transportation had been already crowded. In Palembang subordinate areas like Batu Raja, Kayu Agung, Muara Enim, Lubuk Linggau, Sekayu, and others, a port was built at the estuary or river mouth. The river became an important inter-region connector at that time in the inland. In the capital city of Palembang, houses of high-pitched rafts (pyramidal shaped) standing on the water were built, where a boat was often anchored at the front (Alfian *et al.* eds., 1984). Life near the water is a natural scenery for the kingdom using aquatic lane as the pulse of life.

Akhmad Elvian (2016) mentioned that one of the areas that becomes a crowded human centrum in Bangka Island is in Kotawaringin coast (Kotaberingin). Around the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Kotawaringin was still a simple residence. Some time later, a group of pirates came led by *Raja* (King) Tidung of Borneo that disturbed the inhabitants. Responding to this, the kingdom of Johor sent his hero named Panglima Sarah, at the same time as the kingdom of Minangkabau also sent someone that was intelligent in wars named Hulubalang Alam Harimau Garang. Both helped each other to fight the pirate Raja Tidung (Elvian, 2016).

Either Panglima Sarah or Hulubalang Harimau Garang was believed by Kotawaringin people having good skills and strategies of war. Although both came from different kingdoms, they did not hesitate to help each other and shared tactics to fight the opponent. Commander Sarah and the followers chose to fight on the land, Hulubalang Harimau Garang had a duty to banish opponents from the river. After several episodes of the war, both of them managed to defeat King Tidung. Kotawaringin residents were freed from the threat of pirates.

After gradually secured, both of them led the building of settlements around Kotawaringin river. It had been known, before the war, Panglima Sarah had started this duty earlier by building fortifications in one corner of the coasts of the river. Once, Panglima Sarah arrived at the coast of Kotawaringin before starting the attack against the pirates. The inhabitants of Kotawaringin were very happy, until excitedly got on Panglima Sarah's boat. However, since the burden was too heavy, the boat broke. Panglima Sarah decided to stay for some time in the settlements around the crash site. After consideration, Panglima Sarah ordered the people around to build a fortress for defense needs. The traces of the fortress become one

of the crowded places at a later date. Until now, the fortress can still be found (Elvian, 2016).

What is still related to the events of fighting a group of pirates above is the emergence of Bangkakota as a settlement. Initially, the location now known as Bangkakota was nothing more than an ordinary river coastal area. Since the presence of Panglima Sarah and Hulubalang Alam Harimau Garang, the suburb area became crowded. A moment after being in the inland of Bangka, precisely in a river later named Bangkakota river, Panglima Sarah ordered the villagers to build a camp (*kubu*) on the riverbank. The *kubu* area was known to the public as *Kububangka*, which means the shelter of the people of Bangka Island from the attack of the pirate from Kingdom of Tidung. *Kububangka* name was later changed to “Kotabangka”, and then changed again to “Bangkakota”. Post-defeating King Tidung, Panglima Sarah did not return to Johor in Malay Peninsula, but settled in Bangkakota that was already decided as vassals of Johor Sultanate. The river located on the banks of Bangkakota was later known as Bangkakota river (Elvian, 2016).

In other information, it is explained that some points in the inland of southern Bangka became the safe headquarters for the herd of pirates. Around the year 1729, it is told about the pirate attacks from the Philippines to Sungailiat. The residents there took the fight to be able to repel the pirates. Three years later, further attacks were carried back, but it had not been successful. The pirates then steered their ships to the southern region of Bangka Island, in which at that time the area did not implement a lot tight security. They made the headquarters in Kepo river. From there, the action of robbery was moved to Toboali, Koba, Kurau Pangkol until far into the inland up to Paku. Activities that they did not only to rob tin, but also to catch Bangka’s inhabitants as slaves (Sujitno, 2015).

Still in the same year, about 1729, the Klabat bay also did not escape from the pirate operation. The pirates there called themselves *Rayad* of Siak. In addition, there was also a pirate known as *Lanun* people. Through the Klabat bay which geographically occupied a strategic position, they attacked the bases (*pangkal*) in the inland. The route taken through the Klabat bay towards Bangka Strait and the eastern South China Sea passed the Jering river, Sumubur river, Layang river, and Merawang river. Because some of their herd did not know the Bangka water area, their boat was stuck in the swamp. There was also a pirate of the Riau-Lingga, or exactly a herd of pirates using a ship marked with Riau-Lingga who also reportedly conducted operations in Jebus bay and the east coast of Sungailiat waters.

Along the east coast of Bangka Island, it is widely known as the world’s tin belt. Merawang and Sungailiat become the most productive

Bangka districts in the production of tin in addition to Jebus, Klabat, Pangkalpinang, Belinyu, and Toboali (Elvian, 2016). The regions there are experiencing rapid metamorphosis, from the society that rely the life more on marine and forest products and plantations, to those dominated by tin mining.

Toboali is one of the many old tin bases in Bangka Island. Based on information, it is believed that in Toboali, the Bangka tin was first discovered. Around the year 1719, the people of Johor and Siantan who were the descents of Wan Akup bin Awang did exploration in the Olim river and found the tin mines there. When the tin demand increased, the Sultan of Palembang brought Chinese coolies and among them were assigned to mine tin in the Olim river (Usman *et al. eds.*, 2015).

In the other information, it is mentioned that the discovery of the first tin was in Belo in 1709-1710. Prior to that year, the Bangka Island inhabitants relied on their lives on various forest products, such as resins (for its oil) and honey. Pepper plantations were just introduced later. Although there had been pepper, Palembang Sultanate also had not yet seen Bangka Island as a purveyor of potentially economic revenue (Farida, 2016).

Settlement pattern revolving around the river mouth, added with important linkage of a river-shore, stressed that the Bangka Island people were already so close to the water life. Although this study is still preliminary assessment, but the scattered sources were successfully gathered. At least, it can be used as a starting point of how important the role of the river as a supporter of human life, especially in social contestation across the islands. The discovery of shipwrecks in Mundu river (Mendu) above suggests that in the past, it had already existed the network of intense shipping between the inland and coast of Bangka Island.

There had been settlements at the edge of the river in the era of kingdom of the Archipelago, which was shaped cottage building. Normally, in the large rivers of Sumatra, the people who had professions related to the river would build cottages as temporary resting place. Some of them were living in a place a little bit far from the river, but the other had the environment adjacent to the river. A cottage was a semi-permanent building that can be demolished if the owner wants to move to another place.

Gusti Asnan (2016) explained that the settlements around the river in Sumatra are usually set up in strategic places. There are settlements built in a meeting point between the main rivers and creeks, in the river whose stream is deep (*lubuk*), in the bend of the inside or outside of the river and so on. Residential establishments around the river also weigh on the

potential of nature in the surrounding area, including the availability of food resources. Those are the factors that support the increasingly crowd of a settlement of the river mouth. Later, the economic role begins to appear and becomes a medium that brings improvement of livelihood for the residents (Asnan, 2016).

An early settlement of the riverbank that can be known is a settlement of Sekak tribe on the bank of Layang river. This is a sub-tribe that is different from other sub-tribes living in Bangka Island. The pattern of their lives cannot not be further from the flow of river water. In fact, some of them spent his days on the water. They slept on their own boat. Sekak tribe recently has left for southern Bangka Island, precisely in the small islands in the strait connecting Bangka and Belitung Islands. In the New Order period, about 1970s to 1980s, there had ever been an effort to organize Sekak tribe, by making them occupy a village in Toboali (Usman *et al. eds.*, 2015).<sup>1</sup>

The arrival of Chinese mine workers in the period of the Sultanate of Palembang helped to renew settlements around Bangka Island (Gutzlaff, 1850). Some of them started to build new villages, specially occupied by the Chinese, which was adjacent to the tin mines. One of them was in Singli and Cengel. Some others were those who mingled with the Malay residents. If connected to the function of the bases of the river as the places where tin was collected, it stands to reason that the settlement of Chinese workers was located not far away by streams or creeks.

Ali Usman *et al. eds.* (2015) added that the base can also be understood as a symbol of local authorities' control over the tin. Some bases which allegedly have existed since the kingdom of the Archipelago are Pangkalpinang, Pangkalliat, and Pangkallayang. Local authorities, such as the *Depati* or *Batin*, depended their livelihoods on the results of the tin trade. There were some of the people who worked in the mines owned by their leaders. Not all of the bases were able to maintain their existence, and of the bases operating, those which were the most consistent in maintaining their activities were Pangkal Pinang and Pangkalliat. Later, the two bases encouraged the emergence of a distinctive urban settlement which is now known as Pangkal Pinang, capital city of Bangka Belitung Province; and Sungailiat, one of settlement area that supports Pangkalpinang (Usman *et al. eds.*, 2015; *Ibidem* with footnote 1).

In general, the creation of the base cannot be separated from the existence of tin mines. Nonetheless, it is not correct to say the base is only associated with tin alone. Since before the discovery of tin, there were

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<sup>1</sup>See also, for example, Interview with Ali Usman, Bangka Island Historian, on 20 – 22 November 2015, *Oral Source* is available and owned by the Authors.

several bases that had been built and become a *melting-pot* for some Bangka Island people, one of which was Pangkal Buluh. Pangkal Buluh was located at the bank of Baturusa river. The base became a haven of ships around the Baturusa river. Of various kinds of motives that why people are anchored at the base, one of them is for the sake of trade in the inland (Usman *et al. eds.*, 2015; *Ibidem with footnote 1*).

Akhmad Elvian (2016) added that the mention of the word *pangkal* or *pengkal* is one of the authentic name of an area in Bangka Island. There is a story about the origin of the mention of *pangkal*, in which the word began to be used at the time of Palembang Sultanate when led by Sultan Ahmad Najamuddin I Adikusumo, reigned 1757-1776. He commanded *Tumenggung* to make the bases as the administrative center of the *Demang* and *Jenang*. The two positions were usually occupied by the family of Sultan Palembang. There were 14 bases in Bangka Island, which were later built, among others were Bendul, Rambat, Biat, Bunut, Sungaibuluh, Tempilang, Kotapanji, Layang, Sungailiat, Cengal, Pangkalpinang, Koba, Balar and Toboali. The word *pangkal* was previously interpreted as a center of local government, but over time, the meaning was changed into a tin collection center. In the next development, the use of *pangkal* is increasingly widespread that is to call a district center, city market, port, or a city filled with daily activities (Elvian, 2016).

## CONCLUSION

Rivers are not only considered as waterways, but as loci that give birth to human civilization. It can be found in many places, including Bangka Island, Indonesia. Here the river flows with the sea flow, becoming a kind of path through which the immigrants interact with the local people. There are a number of local stories that form the perception that the river is an inseparable part of the memories of the Bangka Island people's past.

Since the Sriwijaya era until the Sultanate of Palembang period in XVIII century, rivers have played a major role as a connector for human interests. It became a route for tin and pepper ships to pass. He was also the locus of the battle between Panglima Sarah and the pirates, and was a silent witness to the spread of Islam on this island. In the Dutch colonial period, the river was used as a resistance group to fight the domination of the Dutch troops.

It's hard to say, that the biggest challenge in finding sources around the time of research is primary sources. Books and notes written by Europeans, who visited this Bangka Island in the XIX century, became a way out to solve this problem. Actually, this is an inaccuracy, but it is better, than being stuck in a reconstruction impasse.

Rivers in Bangka Island create an aquatic life that drives various social changes. The encounters of local residents with migrants form an understanding of how a culture of hospitality should be formed and strengthened. The presence of Chinese elements in Bangka Island culture, for example, is evidence of the local community's acceptance of immigrant culture.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>**Statement:** We, the undersigned, declare that this article is our academic work; it is not the result of plagiarism, because the sources we cite and refer to are listed in full in the References or Bibliography. We are ready to accept academic sanctions, if what we say is not true and is not in accordance with applicable academic norms.

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### **Bangka Island**

(Source: <https://www.google.com/Bangka+Island>, 02/03.2022)

Since the pre-kingdom of the *Nusantara's* Archipelago, the life of the people of Bangka Island has never been free from water. It is reported in a local source, there is one story of the beginning of human presence in Bangka Island associated with the presence of a large boat cruise from Johor, Malay Peninsula, led by Captain Ragam.